



Recent Film Writing: A Survey

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it by picking up a brick and throwing it through a window, or sitting down somewhere and attracting attention." I think that films haven't changed it, although they've influenced it somewhat, but not necessarily for the better. Because there hasn't been in it the responsibility that there should be. The artists are not in control yet. Those in charge are not a group of artists, they're a bunch of people making money. But now the artists are coming along,

and maybe there's a chance. . . . I don't think we can change the world through films any more. I used to think we could change the world by showing the human condition. But picking up a brick and throwing it, or sitting down someplace in a road, does a much quicker job. I don't have any answers for anything, but I know that I'm not going to make any more pictures that I don't really care about. My motives in the past were different.

ERNEST CALLENBACH

Recent Film Writing: A Survey

"When I was little, I wanted to be a mathematician. I have always been fascinated by those who do pure research, by the great mathematicians who, by making an advance in one direction, unlock years of fruitful research possibilities for succeeding generations. This taste for research is quite personal and absolutely irrational."—Jean-Luc Godard to Jean Collet,
Sept. 1963

It's a satisfaction to film people, in a general way, that so many film books are now being published. After the long lean years, it's comfortable to think that our faith in the art is at last being justified. For if anything signifies Seriousness, it is books. Yet a publisher and editor like myself must be constitutionally skeptical, in hopes of conserving both sanity and trees. The motives people have for wanting to publish are, to say the least, mixed—though we have only recently begun to receive in the film field any sizable number of manuscripts that are clearly sprung from the publish-or-perish fount, that source of so much academic intellectual corruption (not to mention the waste of paper). And especially in a field

where the pace of publication has increased so fast, we need to stop and try to take stock of the purposes and worth of what has been done. There have been a tremendous number of film books published in the past year or so, although the output relative to that of the established fields like English or sociology is still modest. Once, we could have the easy feeling that we could read everything that came out. We now face a situation like that in older fields, where specialization is forced on us whether we like it or not: nobody has the time to read all the books that are appearing. I regret this, personally speaking, because it means a kind of fragmentation and dispersion of intellectual activity, but it seems to be inevitable whenever any subject is attacked by large numbers of people; in science, matters have gone so far that the dozen or so workers really concerned with a given problem communicate with each other by telephone, xerox, or at worst mimeograph, between Berkeley, Cambridge, Dubna, or wherever, and only see other scientists at occasional meetings; publication itself is a side product of the process—not unimportant, of course, but it merely memorializes what has

happened, and adds to the problems of the abstracters and information-retrievers. (When Watson and Crick had cracked the DNA structure, they took pains to bring their report down to a crisp 600 words, and could hardly be accused of littering up the intellectual universe.)

Film is still, however, within the domain of the humanities for most writers who address themselves to it. An occasional sociologist ventures some notions, usually with a generality that film historians consider flimsy; an occasional psychologist uses film as a research recording tool. There are probably some curious scientific problems involved in film perception, but so far no psychologists have found them interesting. People writing about film have usually been interested in it either because it's an art that intrigues them (like most critics) or because it's a mass medium they hope can be turned to political advantage (a tradition going back to John Grierson, who was a political scientist and socialist agitator). We are now, however, coming to a point where both of these emphases seem limited and insufficient, and people seem to be getting ready to try integrating them, to deal with film as an art that is inherently political even in the most apolitical hands. I want to return to this crucial matter later, in discussing some recent critical books. However, to get a perspective in which the few critical works of importance can be discussed—and to try and do some kind of justice to the many books of recent vintage which we have not reviewed separately, though we will return to some in future issues—I'd like to present a brief survey of the recent film-book output (not at all exhaustive), trying to sort it out a bit and sketch some patterns, directions, and pitfalls.

ANTHOLOGIES

It was discovered about five years ago, when film study first began to catch on in colleges, that there wasn't much available in paperback that the students would read. Arnheim bored them, and they had never seen the German films he was talking about. Knight was too text-

bookish. But the kids *would* read articles; you could get them to at least thumb through Dan Talbot's pioneer collection. Since then, a procession of editors has combed through the journals and put practically every decent article ever written into some collection or other; but the process is continuing apace with collections of reviews, grouped around major films, apparently intended to be used as readings for classes who are viewing the films. Since the reviews tend to be disparate in their approaches and responses, this is evidently intended to promote discussion by proving that films are fun to argue about (not that students exactly need proof).

P. Adams Sitney has, in his *Film Culture* anthology, shown that a special-purpose collection may still have point and vitality. However, as intellectual activity, the compiling of an anthology is hardly the most demanding task you could undertake; at this point, it mostly seems to be thought a good way to get your name on a publication without doing any actual writing, except maybe an introduction. Like all text-use-oriented publishing, it tends toward low common denominators because that is where the real money is. I personally think that we've now got more anthologies than we can use, and that would-be collectors should hold off a couple of years to allow the real writers to produce some more good material. Even cannibals need to pause between courses.

Film Culture Reader. Edited and with an introduction by P. Adams Sitney. New York: Praeger, 1971. \$12.50. Sitney contributes a thoughtful introduction, and also one of the main items of theoretical interest, his essay on "structural film." (Another is Dziga Vertov.)

The Movies as Medium. Edited, with an introduction by Lewis Jacobs. New York: Noonday, 1970. \$3.65.

Film and the Liberal Arts. Edited by T. J. Ross. New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1970. Though depressingly textbookish, draws from an unusually broad group of sources.

A Casebook on Film. Ed. by Charles Thomas Samuels. New York: Van Nostrand, 1970. \$3.25. A book of

readings, both general and grouped around *The Graduate*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, and *Blow-Up*.

Film as Film: Critical Responses to Film Art. Edited by Joy Gould Boyum and Adrienne Scott. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1971. \$4.95. Groups reviews of films by various reviewers for classroom discussion use.

Renaissance of the Film. Edited by Julius Bellone. New York: Collier Books, 1970. \$2.95. Anthology of criticism on major postwar films.

Celluloid and Symbols. Ed. by John C. Cooper and Carl Skrade. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970. \$2.95. Essays on religious aspects of cinema.

INTERVIEW BOOKS

Directors have been the chief prey of interviewers, but also industry old-timers, stars, cameramen, and so on. Interviews can be entertaining, and they can be informative if you have a copious supply of grains of salt to take them with; they have, above all, the great virtue of getting the reader close to the firing-line at which films are actually produced. But too few of the people who undertake interviews bother to prepare themselves competently, so they're at the mercy of the interviewee: they haven't seen many of his films, they don't know the major turning points in his life, they don't know who his friends and enemies are, they aren't well acquainted with the world in which he has lived—they are, in short, gullible, and since they are also often lazy and don't check what the interviewee says against other sources, this gullibility passes on unchallenged into the printed interviews. Thus future readers come to accept as candid fact what is often deliberate or unconscious self-justification, rationalization, or even sometimes (on really important questions) just plain deceit. These problems afflict the official "oral history" tape-recording projects that have existed at UCLA and the American Film Institute as well as individual freelance interviewers; there just aren't that many well-equipped interviewers around. For every Charles Higham or Albert Johnson who has seen every film a man has made (and

remembers them) there are many young and intrepid would-be "scholars" who are willing to interview men of whose work they are almost entirely ignorant. The problem is worth noticing not only as cautionary for book buyers but as a general intellectual problem: it is characteristic of American technological-know-how-gee-whiz-hardware-will-solve-it scholarship to think that merely tape-recording important people's words can suffice—when it is really only the beginning of a process of evaluation and analysis of a distinctly old-fashioned kind, involving the confrontation of facts (such as words but also records) by an active and informed human mind. The words are necessary, but far from sufficient. Moreover, the choice of whom to interview is as difficult as how to interview him. Presumably, a certain rapport is essential between subject and interviewer, as well as basic knowledge on the interviewer's part and some candor on the subject's. Presumably it is impossible to interview *everybody*. What it all comes down to, I think, is that good interviews always result from the initiative of an informed interviewer who is really interested in a man's work, personally and technically, who has taken the trouble to acquaint himself with it, and can show others why that work is worth thinking about. This means that if you are interviewing cameramen you need to understand lighting and cameras and film stock; you have to *care* about them.

It seems to me that we are vastly overburdened with both useful and trivial interviews with directors; the only kind that might represent a major contribution at this point would be along the book-length interview lines of Tom Milne's marathon conversation with Llosay, or Truffaut's with Hitchcock.

But we are drastically short of material on writers above all, and on producers to a lesser extent. Now that the great era of craftsmanship in Hollywood is over, such interviewing is bound to be archaeological; at its best it will have the compensating fervor of a Kevin Brownlow. But it may have practical import-

ance as well as the scholarly role of preserving the past if it can help carry over into the era of the smaller, more personal film some of the spirit of workmanship without which even disposable art cannot hold our attention.

In *Film Quarterly*, we have sometimes tried to develop a "case history" approach to interviewing, talking to various people who worked on a given film, hoping to capture something of the strangely collaborative nature of filmmaking and coming out, inevitably, with a *Rashomon*-like result. Given volatile collaborators and enough time for proper checking, this could also be a fruitful way to do an interview book. And it is interesting to interview filmmakers who work in a common school, as Alan Rosenthal does in his forthcoming *Documentary in Action*.

The Film Director as Superstar. By Joseph Gelmis. New York: Doubleday, 1970. \$6.95. Unusually acute and articulate interviewing, but the individual interviews are often disappointingly short, perhaps from a desire to cover too many people. Includes 16 directors who have come from outside the industry, from McBride to Bertolucci to Nichols.

Directors at Work: Interviews with American Film-Makers. Edited by Bernard R. Kantor, Irwin R. Blacker, and Anne Kramer. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1971. \$10.00. Chatty conversations, sometimes illuminating (Stanley Kramer is one of Jerry Lewis's favorite filmmakers; it was films by Eisenstein and Dovzhenko that brought Kazan into theater). Included are Brooks, Cukor, Jewison, Kazan, Kramer, Lester, Lewis, Silverstein, Wise, and Wyler. The interviewers ask nice sociable questions, and sometimes hit pay dirt, but pass up many opportunities (they let Wise discuss the cutting of *Ambersons* with utter vagueness).

Hollywood Cameramen. By Charles Higham. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970. \$5.95. "There is still room for veterans; and this book is a testimony to their individual skills." The light these old men throw on their directors is not so flattering as their treatment of stars; Daniels is especially intriguing on Stroheim, and Garmes on Sternberg ("He left the lighting to me at all times"). Higham has modestly but perhaps unwisely edited out his questions, since he has the knowledge needed to ask good ones.

The Real Tinsel. By Bernard Rosenberg and Harry Silverstein. New York: Macmillan, 1970. \$9.95. Mostly interviews with old Hollywood hands.

HOW-TO-DO-IT BOOKS

The original master at this kind of thing, Raymond Spottiswoode, died recently in a car crash (somebody might compile a grim obituary list of film people done in by the automobile). There's now a proliferation of books aimed at college students, high school students, even elementary school students, but none of these so far has the firm, intellectually elegant grasp of technical material that makes Spottiswoode's *Encyclopedia of Film and Television Techniques* the last word. If you really want to know what you're doing (whether or not you like to think you're "a professional") you need to have the *Encyclopedia* handy.

Photographic Theory for the Motion Picture Cameraman and Practical Motion Picture Photography. Compiled and edited by Russell Campbell. New York: Barnes, 1970. \$2.95 per volume. First volumes in a new series of texts coming out of the London Film School. Carefully prepared technical information, incorporating quotes from experienced cameramen.

Filming Works Like This. By Jeanne and Robert Benick. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971. \$4.95. A technical primer for secondary school use.

Professional 16/35mm Cameraman's Handbook. By Verne and Sylvia Carlson. New York: Hastings, 1970. \$15.00.

How to Make Animated Movies. By Anthony Kinsey. New York: Studio, 1970. \$6.95. A concise history and guide to simple, inexpensive animation techniques.

The Work of the Film Director. By A. J. Reynertson. New York: Hastings House, 1970. \$13.50. A useful though not exciting survey of directional tasks in a feature film.

SCRIPTS

Ever since the notion began to get around that it was interesting to see how films were put together, the transitory and fugitive status

of film prints has posed an almost insurmountable problem. The primary way to study film is of course to study film prints; everything else, however intriguing, is of accessory interest, like a poet's notes or a novelist's first draft. If 8mm copies of films had been available from the beginning in libraries throughout the land, only in rare cases of "philological" interest would anyone have thought to publish a script. And someday, if cartridge-sales ever replace the reel-rental distribution system, we may achieve a situation which by-passes scripts.

At present, however, and rather startlingly, script publication has become very big business, rather like sound-track records: some 250,000 copies of *Easy Rider* have been sold. Such illustrated books are presumably used by young readers much as the records are—to "recreate" the film after they've seen it, rather than for study purposes. But anybody who wants to do close analysis of films can learn a lot from the many script books now coming out, both on currently popular American hits and on classics and European films. Few of the script books are done with the meticulous attention to final-film detail of the Grove Press books that were edited by Robert Hughes—most of them are slightly revised versions of the original script, which suffers various alterations in production. Such versions are always useful, but readers must beware of thinking they represent the author's "purest" intention, from which the film in its released form can only be a falling-off. Sometimes, of course, commercial pressures are behind changes (good or bad); but film-makers also constantly get new ideas, encounter structural or length problems they hadn't anticipated, or simply find that an idea that looks fine on paper doesn't work on the screen. The best light on such matters is thrown by the French series, *L'Avant-Scène du Cinéma*, which prints original versions but indicates later deletions and also additions; we would do well to follow the French example here.

The scripts coming out seem to me impressive in variety. After a beginning with Antoni-

oni and Bergman some years ago, publishers have discovered that far more rarified items than *Tom Jones* can be safely if modestly marketed; and thus we have not only fashionable current directors but also René Clair, Cocteau, Rossellini. Most of these scripts we owe to the enterprise of continental and British editors who have gotten them out of the production companies. It has always been more difficult to obtain publishing rights to American films, since our agents and lawyers seem to be hungrier than their European counterparts, but it can be done—even for *Citizen Kane*, whose script will shortly appear along with Pauline Kael's long essay "Raising Kane" in a volume to be called *The Citizen Kane Book*. Since writers were—and remain—so important in Hollywood, it is especially unfortunate to have had little of their work published, except in the mid-forties in the *Best Screenplays of 19—* volumes. The auteur "theory," apparently, has so hypnotically focused attention on directors that nobody has thought of editing a series of American scripts—a deficiency I am told will be remedied soon.

Salesman. Script drawn from the film, with introduction by Harold Clurman, production notes by Howard Junker, and filmography of the Maysles brothers. New York: Signet, 1969. \$.75.

Saint Joan: A Screenplay by Bernard Shaw. Ed. by Bernard F. Dukore. Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1970. \$2.45.

Alice's Restaurant. The original screenplay by Venable Herndon and Arthur Penn. New York: Doubleday, 1970. \$1.95. With forewords by Herndon and Penn.

Beauty and the Beast. By Jean Cocteau. Bilingual script edited by Robert M. Hammond. New York: NYU Press, 1970. \$14.95. A careful scholarly reconstitution of the script; should be useful in French classes dealing with films.

Carl Theodor Dreyer: Four Screenplays. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1970. \$12.00. *Passion of Joan of Arc*, *Vampyr*, *Day of Wrath*, *Ordet*. Translated by Oliver Stallybrass. Introduction by Ole Storm.

Little Fauss and Big Halsy. By Charles Eastman. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970. \$2.25. The original screenplay, with illustrations.

David Holzman's Diary. By L. M. Kit Carson from a film by Jim McBride. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970. \$4.95.

Duet for Cannibals. Susan Sontag. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$2.25.

René Clair: Four Screenplays (*Le Silence est d'or*, *La Beauté du diable*, *Les Belles-de-Nuit*, and *Les Grandes manœuvres*). New York: Grossman, 1970. \$4.95. With forewords and commentaries by Clair: witty, perceptive, glacially elegant.

Federico Fellini: Three Screenplays (*Il Vitelloni*, *Il Bidone*, *The Temptations of Dr. Antonio*). New York: Grossman, 1970. \$3.50.

Visconti: Three Screenplays (*White Nights*, *Rocco and His Brothers*, *The Job*—episode from *Boccaccio '70*), and second volume **Two Screenplays** (*La Terra Trema*, *Senso*). New York: Grossman, 1970. \$3.50 and \$2.50 respectively.

DIRECTOR STUDIES

It is not clear who first took seriously the idea that you could write a whole book about a film-maker, just as you could about a novelist or painter. As early as 1940 Iris Barry of the Museum of Modern Art published a 40-page essay on Griffith—edging beyond article length, but not yet venturing a full-scale book. In 1942 Robert Feild's *The Art of Walt Disney* appeared—but it focused more on Disney's technology and organization than on his art. Like so much in postwar film criticism, the idea of director monographs as we know them may have taken practical form through André Bazin, who was an active agitator for film as well as critic—though I don't believe his name is mentioned in the account that publisher Pierre L'Herminier gives of his starting the Seghers series in Paris. It is clear, at any rate, that the Editions Universitaires and Seghers series established a tradition of short, commissioned, illustrated books including both a critical essay

and a filmography, sometimes plus selected documents—quotes from reviews, interview excerpts, and the like. Both the advantages and the defects of the French system have been carried over into their English-language equivalents. As an expression of the systematic and categoric habits of the French, the Paris series admirably tried to cover both the old masters (L'Herminier began with Méliès) and the new: Antonioni, Resnais, Hitchcock. Some of the studies were substantial works of analysis, like the Hitchcock study by Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol, and others in the Editions Universitaires series. The Seghers series tended to have shorter texts—sometimes, indeed, virtually no longer than a major article—which varied greatly in quality.

The danger in a commissioned series, as opposed to the publication of occasional works, is that the pressure to keep the series going and publishing regularly tends to lower the quality of the output. This happens for two reasons: the editors, having gone through the available best possibilities in both authors and subjects, begin to have to commission works that are less promising; and the commissioning system itself tends to result in authors turning in lower-quality manuscripts than they are likely to do if the writing is undertaken primarily on their own initiative.

A strong editor who is in a position to exert detailed control over the work, like Ian Cameron in at least the early part of his Movie Paperback series, can counteract these tendencies to some extent. Interestingly enough, British publishers have thus far had the series field to themselves; Cameron, Peter Cowie at Tantivy Press (Zwemmer-Barnes), and James Price, who has managed the series edited by the British Film Institute staff, have had no American series competition so far, though at least one plan for an American series is now afoot. Whether this signifies superior British publishing energy or superior American caution, we may take it, I think, that few really excellent director studies are going to appear no matter what publishers do. The writing of a full-scale book on a film-maker, like its

counterpart in other arts, requires the devotion of several years of effort by a skilled critic even in relatively favorable practical circumstances (such as easy access to a major archive). Director studies are not very economically attractive to established critics, compared to the writing of occasional or regular articles and reviews, for which magazines now offer good pay. Nonetheless, critical studies of major directors are touchstones in film criticism and arguably the most important kind of critical work there is. It is to be hoped, therefore, that young scholars—who have the advantages over their elders of more leisure and presumably fewer settled prejudices—will begin to write director monographs that aspire to the standards of perception, intelligence, command of original and secondary material, and general cultural awareness that we expect in other intellectual endeavors. Whether because of its technological side or other factors, film as an academic discipline has always tended toward separatism and ghettoization. Writing just for film nuts is as debilitating as writing just for Dryden specialists. We need more books which, like Donald Richie on Kurosawa, Robin Wood on Bergman, or Charles Higham on Welles, attempt to give a detailed and reasoned assessment of a director's work in the context of what used to be called "his life and times." As far as I can tell, there is no question that if such manuscripts are written, publishers will publish them; at the University of California Press, at any rate, we regard such works as of the highest priority.

With director studies as such we should perhaps list certain books *by* directors, though these are rare and, in the case of Hollywood people, usually ghost-written and publicity-prone. Eisenstein's *Notes of a Film Director* is a major and perhaps humanizing addition to his writings. But too few film-makers take the time to write seriously of their own work as René Clair or Jean Cocteau did, or as Joseph von Sternberg did; despite a certain amount of guile or bile, such considered statements have a value that goes far beyond any number of interviews, especially when the interviews are

conducted in the penumbra of a publicity campaign for a man's latest film. It is good news that both Welles and Renoir are reported at work on autobiographies. But how much can be lost when, as was apparently the case with the Chaplin book, a publisher accepts a ghost-written manuscript!

Jean-Luc Godard: An Investigation into His Films and Philosophy. By Jean Collet. (New York: Crown, 1970. \$2.95) Seghers volume.

The Lubitsch Touch: By Herman G. Weinberg. New York: Dutton, 1968. \$2.45. Modelled on the Seghers books, containing a rather charmingly enthusiastic biographical essay, excerpts from the script of *Ninotchka*, interviews, quotes from critics, annotated filmography, and bibliography.

Sergei Eisenstein. By Leon Moussinac. New York: Crown, 1970. \$2.95. A rather scrappy book, translated from the Seghers series.

Griffith and the Rise of Hollywood. By Paul O'Dell. New York: A. S. Barnes, 1971. \$2.95.

D. W. Griffith: The Years at Biograph. By Robert M. Henderson. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970. \$7.50. A carefully researched account, chiefly of historical rather than critical interest.

Film Essays and a Lecture. By Sergei Eisenstein. Edited by Jay Leyda. New York: Praeger, 1970. \$2.95. Some short polemical essays (one of which, calling for better film criticism in 1945, got Eisenstein banned from the pages of *Iskusstvo Kino*) and some longer pieces. With Leyda's complete bibliography of all Eisenstein's writings, translated and untranslated.

Notes of a Film Director. By Sergei Eisenstein. New York: Dover, 1971. \$1.95. A paperback of the 1958 volume.

Movie Paperbacks: *Lindsay Anderson*, by Elizabeth Sussex, \$1.95. *Samuel Fuller*, by Phil Hardy, \$2.50. *The Films of Robert Bresson*, by Ayfre, Barr, Bazin, Durnnat, Hardy, Millar, and Murray, \$2.50. *Arthur Penn*, by Robin Wood, \$2.50. *Claude Chabrol*, by Robin Wood and Michael Walker, \$2.50. *Roberto Rossellini*, by Jose Luis Guarnier, \$2.50.

International Film Guide Series: *The Cinema of François Truffaut*, by Graham Petrie, \$2.50. *The Cinema of Roman Polanski*, by Ivan Butler, \$2.95.

British Film Institute Series: *Pasolini on Pasolini: Interviews with Oswald Stack*. *Horizons West: Studies in Authorship in the Western*, by Jim Kitses. *Rouben Mamoulian*, by Tom Milne. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970. \$5.95 cloth, \$2.95 paper, per volume.

HISTORY

If the writing of director studies is difficult, the writing of history is murderous. Indeed, if we understand by "history" the kind of book that Terry Ramsaye or Lewis Jacobs wrote, no one in America has since ventured to try it, though we have had a few good books covering limited periods. As far as I know, the only book of recent years that could be considered a major historical achievement is Lotte Eisner's *Haunted Screen* (University of California Press, 1969. \$10.95), her study of the German expressionist period. Pauline Kael's forthcoming study of *Kane* shows, I think, how history of the American film *ought* to be written: it is careful research done by an informed and skeptical mind, equipped with sharp critical vision and a view of American life and art sufficiently flexible and sophisticated to cope with the ironies and complexities that abound in an expensive and industrial art like film. (One persistent defect of British criticism of American films is the authors' sketchy acquaintance with American life—a defect no doubt equally apparent when Americans write about British or European films.) We must hope that the *New Yorker's* example in running the *Kane* study will be followed by other magazines, who can finance the necessary research effort to a degree that few if any book publishers can. But here again, we must look to young scholars, who are preparing dissertations or earning their bread by teaching, and thus have the time and energy available for the effort of experiencing and synthesizing and placing in perspective which the writing of history requires. Our archival resources at the

Library of Congress, plus the George Eastman House and the Museum of Modern Art, now make it possible to work on historical problems of the American film without going to Paris. Whether in film departments, history departments, or even art departments, we should soon begin to see work which justifies the effort and money that has been put into preservation programs in recent years.

Early American Cinema. By Anthony Slide. New York: A. S. Barnes, 1970. \$2.45. Carefully researched brief account of the major movie-making companies to about 1915; with a good description of many Griffith films still too little known.

The Citizen Kane Book, now in press, will contain Pauline Kael's essay from the *New Yorker*, "Raising Kane," plus the script. Boston: Atlantic, Little-Brown, 1971.

The Making and Unmaking of "Que Viva Mexico." Edited by Harry M. Geduld and Ronald Gottesman. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970. \$15.00. Assembles all the available documents on this unfortunate episode; neither Eisenstein nor Upton Sinclair partisans can take any particular comfort from the materials.

French Film. By Roy Armes. New York: Dutton, 1970. \$2.25. Thumbnail sketches of forty directors, from Lumière to Lelouch.

Mary Pickford, Comedienne. By Kemp R. Niver. Los Angeles: Historical Films, Box 46505, L.A. 90046. \$7.50. Biograph catalogue descriptions and frame enlargements from early Pickford films.

REFERENCE BOOKS

Film as an industry has had its yearbooks and annuals for a long time, of mixed usefulness. Recently special-purpose compilations have begun appearing, but unless something happens to the American Film Institute index project before its work gets published, we will shortly have a reliable guide to the credits and synopses of virtually all films ever produced in this country. The reprinting of the *New York*

Times reviews gives an additional library resource. Annuals and journals such as *Film-facts* will continue to have some current use, but the AFI volumes should put an end to those tiresome compilations of illustrated credits which clutter the remainder shelves; the pack-rat instinct to compile information for information's sake can now be diverted toward something else. Record-keeping is useful, but it will now be clear that the problem is really to make sense of the record: to write works of history.

"Screen" Series: Germany, by Felix Bucher. **Eastern Europe**, by Nina Hibbin. **Sweden 1**, by Peter Cowie. **Sweden 2** (a thematic critical study), by Peter Cowie. New York: Barnes, 1970. \$2.95 per volume. Illustrated alphabetical guides to film-makers and actors.

John Willis' 1970 Screen World Annual. New York: Crown, 1970. \$8.95. Stills and credits for 1969 releases in US.

The American Musical, by Tom Vallance, and **The Gangster Film**, by John Baxter. New York: A. S. Barnes, 1971. \$3.50 each. Reference indexes.

Films in America, 1929-1969. By Martin Quigley, Jr., and Richard Gertner. New York: Golden Press, 1970. \$12.95. A surpassingly dumb book, mixing about 400 box-office triumphs with serious work, aiming to please every reader a little but actually suiting nobody. The plot precis text is excruciating. Pages 335-358 (covering 1968 and 1969) have been omitted from some copies by printer's error.

MISCELLANEOUS

Writers and publishers have tried various other handles by which to get a marketable hold on the medium. There has always been a steady flow of books about individual stars from commercial publishers—more or less gushy, more or less publicity-motivated, more or less phony and ghost-written. Occasionally a writer who actually knows movies will write about stars—as Richard Griffith did—but it's not a genre that needs encouragement. A related offshoot, illustrated books about eroticism

in the movies, sprouted briefly in France and England, but seems unlikely to pop up here when you now can see actual filmed sex at the skin houses downtown. Special genres of cinema—animation or horror or westerns or whatnot—have given the opportunity for luxuriously illustrated books, but their texts have usually been their weakest link. Then there are the books which are not quite theory, not quite criticism, not quite how-to-do-it, tumbling amid the stools. And—regrettably rare—there are books which, like the paperback reissue of Wolfenstein and Leites, represent a genuinely interdisciplinary approach; but where are the books on film that ought to be written by lawyers, economists, sociologists, anthropologists?

The Movies. By Richard Griffith and Arthur Mayer (revised and updated edition). New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970. \$19.95. Perhaps the best gift available for the general movie fan: an intelligent miscellaneous survey of film from the beginnings.

The Movie Stars. By Richard Griffith. New York: Doubleday, 1970. \$25.00. A sometimes penetrating, sometimes arch or superficial book; very good printing of well-selected photos.

The Moving Image: A Guide to Cinematic Literacy. By Robert Gessner. New York: Dutton, 1971. \$3.95. Raises some important questions about scriptwriting, but the answers are routine or worse.

The Language of Film. By Rod Whitaker. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1970. \$4.95. Brief general introduction to film-making.

Movies: A Psychological Study. By Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites. New York: Atheneum, 1970. \$3.45. The perceptive 1950 study of the "good-bad girl" and other mythic phenomena; recommended for young critics now undertaking structuralist and "iconographic" work.

Stardom. By Alexander Walker. New York: Stein & Day, 1970. \$10.00. From Gish and Valentine through McQueen and Poitier.

Art in Movement. By John Halas and Roger Manvell. New York: Hostings House, 1970. \$17.50. A lavishly

illustrated but rather mundanely written survey of contemporary developments in the animated-film field, which has achieved an immense variety of styles in recent years.

Films on the Campus: Cinema Production in Colleges and Universities. By Thomas Fensch. New York: A. S. Barnes, 1970. \$15.00. A report on the many film departments now active in American universities (even in West Virginia!) which only adds to one's doubts whether film can be taught.

CRITICISM

I come now to my chief concern, criticism and "theory." It seems to me that we now have critical resources that greatly surpass those of a decade ago; our general-audience magazines, in particular, are now immensely better served, and the critical books which have flowed from this journalistic work seem to me to constitute a remarkable outpouring of critical energy, knowledge, and intelligence. Many new and good critics continue to develop within the specialized film journals. As a congenital pessimist, I choke to say it, but we *have* never had it so good.

Nevertheless, speaking more as an editor than a critic, I would like to try here to make some sense of what has been happening in film criticism recently on the level of ideas. I do not propose another round of critical arm-wrestling, of which I am probably more tired than any reader could be. Nor do I have a defensive attitude about film criticism's contribution to our culture. It is reported that when an actor attacked John Simon, in a television debate, Simon tried to justify his role as a critic by lamely recounting how he had worked in dramatic productions and so on; even Pauline Kael, when attacked along the line of how can you know anything about it if you've never done it, once retreated to telling of her work with the San Francisco underground. Such arguments are farcical because they ignore the fact that criticism is an art in its own right. Writers who can get hundreds of thousands of intelligent persons to read their stuff are clearly

practitioners with some kind of real skill; but it's not the same skill that film-makers have, much less actors. Like film-making, criticism is a kind of culture-secretion, and they share a few elementary prerequisites like taste and intelligence; but the working requirements of the two are utterly different. We might as well demand of an actor that he be able to write a readable, stimulating, informative critique as ask a critic to act (or direct, for that matter). The business of the film-maker is to make films; the business of the critic is to react to them—as sensitively and intelligently and wisely and interestingly as he can. I don't find a balance of presumption on either side. There is a plainly visible Darwinian selection process among critics, just as among actors; if you can act or write so that it impresses and interests people, and have reasonable luck, you'll be able to work and become known. It would be excellent if more critics tried their hand at scriptwriting or directing, and more directors tried their hand at writing criticism, but it isn't obligatory; they are working opposite sides of the same movie street, and should have the mutual regard of good gunfighters or good con men or good trial lawyers.

Our critics span a range of philosophical assumptions and tastes which is broad enough (though so far entirely bourgeois) to cope with almost all films produced in recent years, one way or another; you have always been able to find a critic who could deal with films in a way that seemed reasonable to you, whether your tastes ran to Hawks, Kramer, or Bergman.

In what way, then, can this body of critical work be considered deficient?

One way to begin is by noting that practically nobody writes *books* of film criticism. If this seems a strange statement after a year when more film books have probably been published than in all previous publishing history, consider that among the books that could be considered as serious, major criticism only a tiny handful were original, "real" books—Wood on Bergman and Higham on Welles,

above all. For the rest—Kael, Farber, Sarris, Pechter (and Youngblood to a lesser extent)—all was packaging together of previously written material. I indicated earlier one practical reason for this—you can make a living by writing for magazines, and you can't just by writing books. Robin Wood, I believe, mainly teaches to live; so does another excellent British writer, Raymond Durgnat. But in this country our film teachers don't seem to include talented critical writers, with the exception of Sarris, who has begun to teach at Columbia.

Now journalism is not necessarily a bad thing for writers. Bazin was, after all, a journalist, and a harried one at that. Some of Shaw's best writing was done under journalistic pressure. A weekly deadline can be an inspiration, and so can the fact that in weekly criticism you get no chance for second thoughts or leisurely revision. Nonetheless, writing in the review format has drastic limitations. You can imply theoretical matters, but in the general press you had better be sure they don't get too heavy. You can recur to themes broached in another piece, but you had better make every review essentially free-standing—you can't depend on the reader keeping a connected argument in mind from one to the next. You can mention old films, but you had better organize your reviews around current ones, and if you generate any historical perspectives, you had better keep them light. Moreover, the finer a writer you are, the harder it becomes to turn your reviews into genuine chapters of a book (even supposing editors encouraged you to try); for a review done by a skilled writer is a special-purpose item that cannot easily be put to other purposes. From a practical working standpoint, thus, reviews aren't really useful grist for an integrated book—they may, indeed, be outright obstacles.

An equally severe problem with working as a weekly critic is that it forces you to waste your time: especially with today's situation where foreign films are having a hard time entering the US market and domestic production is falling off, there simply isn't a film

worth writing about every week. (Or indeed sometimes every month.) And this disability is simply memorialized in the ensuing books. In *Going Steady*, for instance, out of some 76 films Kael discusses about ten seem to matter to her as films. She has important and intriguing things to say about many of the unimportant films; but when the balance tips this far one feels it as a waste of talent—not only is criticism here an independent art, but a superior one; it's like devoting an orchid-grower's finesse to the production of snap beans. There is no question that the ordinary output of an art-industry like film deserves some attention, above all because the first works of promising talents generally fall into the less-than-triumphant category, and also because film criticism is inevitably cultural criticism and must convey to the reader some sense of the general cultural output surrounding works of unusual interest. But what we most relish in good criticism is the sense of a fine mind responding to a fine work: in fact, it is the excitement of this give-and-take process, which Kael is extraordinarily good at conveying, that makes criticism an art: who really reads critics to obtain ratings for movies? Sometimes, indeed, the critique that fascinates us most is busily setting forth an opinion on a film utterly different from our own. (Just as, in science, we may admire a co-worker's experimental technique but believe that his results must be interpreted differently.)

As a group, our American big-time critics are very good at responding to movies; in one way or another, they make you feel that it would be simply marvelous to hang around listening to them in person. (Complaints have even been heard about the cult of personality in film criticism, where the critic become the star just as the director has.) They are sensitive and witty people, often with a stunning gift of phrase. I think it not far off to say, however, that general ideas do not much interest them. Why this is, I do not pretend to know; perhaps there is something about the very act of writing criticism which means that one tends to so intently focus upon the work in

immediate question that sensitivity in that context triumphs over all more general kinds of mental activity. Theorizing, that particular speculative curiosity which motors science, takes after all a very special mental set. Its presumption may even be inherently at odds with art, which is by nature unsystematic, ad hoc, furtive, messy, vital. (Or so at least I would imagine Pauline Kael might argue.) The theorist must attempt to "rise above" individual cases, to arrive at large generalizations—a process which inevitably dissociates his sensitivity from actual films, at least to some extent. It is significant that Bazin, the most theoretical critic of our times, also relied constantly on scientific allusions and metaphors in his work.

Theorizing can be a pleasure quite in itself, of course, just as playful activity. But as a kind of intellectual work it appeals to disappointingly few people. Besides, it's scary; as Kael remarks, "In the arts, one can never be altogether sure that the next artist who comes along won't disprove one's formulations." However, this is a risk any person who indulges in what we might very loosely call "scientific" thinking has to take. Indeed it is practically foregone that one will look a bit silly, for every generation of scientists reworks and refines previous thought—sometimes even throwing it out bodily. There is no reason to hope that criticism (even Bazin's!) can be exempt from this process; nor can concentrating on the refinement of taste exempt one—for tastes too change, indeed even more rapidly and irrationally.

Criticism *needs* ideas, however, and I would like to spell out some of the reasons, perhaps a bit painfully. Criticism cannot in fact rely upon "taste" alone; every good critic's way of thinking rests, if we bother to analyze it carefully, upon a pattern of assumptions, aesthetic and social; and it employs a constellation of terms appropriate to those assumptions. The act of "criticism," in essence, as opposed to the mere opinion-mongering of most of the daily press, is the application of such terms to the realities of a given film: describing it, analyzing it, evaluating it, and in the process also refining

the terms and assumptions. Nobody would enjoy it much if the process were carried out in an obvious and mechanical way; on the other hand, there are benefits to be gained by carrying it out with more intellectual elegance and determination than are customary among our film critics. For the terminologies current today really don't seem to be suitable for coping with crucial current developments; they leave the sensitivity and intelligence of the critics stranded whenever a difficult new film appears—a *Persona*, *Weekend*, or *Rise to Power of Louis XIV*.

Assumptions and terms reasonably suitable for dealing with conventional narrative fictions have been around for a long time. Basically "realist" in tenor, these ideas have never applied very well to non-narrative and expressionist forms, especially experimental ones; the neglect of experimental film by critics has been due at least as much to practical embarrassment at this as to the inaccessibility or low quality of the films. They have also, as Brian Henderson suggests elsewhere in this issue, not been very useful for analyzing internal ("part-whole") relationships in works of art—precisely the kind of formal analysis we need to fall back on in a period like the present when relations to reality have become largely moot.

Realist assumptions tend to deal in terms of essences, but film has no single essence such as Bazin sought—it is a multiform medium, and all signs point to our entering a period of increasing fragmentation. We may never reach another consensus, such as underlay traditional Hollywood craftsmanship, as to what film is or ought to be. Assumptions may henceforth have to be couched in terms of polarities, or "ideal types." The notions that will seem natural to the future are almost literally invisible to us, because they will make assumptions we cannot entertain. It seems certain, however, that any new nomenclature must include terms for dealing with the relations between the art's materials and its forms, and the relations between the work and its viewer. Surrounding and to some extent subsidiary to such terms will be various others concerned with technique or

style: questions on the level our criticism now chiefly deals with. But where are the critics who are developing new terms? (I must reserve judgment about the "structuralist" school of analysis until it shows itself more clearly in English; so far, work under this banner has seemed either conventionally literary-thematic analysis or "iconography" on a stupefyingly naive level.)

The critic needs new ideas because otherwise it is impossible to articulate what the new film-maker feels and does; otherwise the most delicate critical faculties can register only zeroes. Most artists, of course, have ideas they are plenty willing to express, and indeed often talk in a strongly programmatic style. (The Flaherty Seminars were an attempt to institutionalize this phenomenon.) It's seldom, however, that artists have an interest in or grasp of large trends in their art, and the root act of artistic creation is in any event not ideational. A rare film-maker, like Eisenstein, happens to be good at theorizing about his own kind of work; Godard, in his elliptical and maddening way, seems to be the only one around at present. But aside from such rare exceptions, we will get our ideas about what is going on from critics, or we will not get them at all. It would be a good thing if our critics could, over the next couple of years, come up with some new and coherent ones.

Every critic worth reading has some heresy to propound, and William Pechter's in *Twenty-four Times a Second* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971. \$8.95) is that of revelation: he believes that the truth is ready to hand, if only somebody will come forward to seize it, like Lancelot picking up the magic sword. Thus he tends to be a little scornful of other views, brashly over-confident that he is of the Elect. In fact, when he is good he is very good, but sometimes he is not. His explication of *Breathless* is acute, energetic—his abilities outstretched to cope with a challenging work. His defense of de Broca's *Five Day Lover*, and of de Broca's essentially noncomic talent, is the kind of clarification of style and genre we badly

need and rarely get. But his attempted clearing of the air about *Marienbad* gets nowhere because he is unwilling to entertain the possibility that the film is as psychological as it is, and as un"moral"—he writes of its containing "scarcely a line of dialogue that one can imagine being spoken." Yet clearly, if the film makes any sense to anybody at all, this can't be true. And it seems in fact that most of us, though perhaps not Pechter, do indeed "imagine" dialogue like *Marienbad's* in plenty of our adolescent and not-so-adolescent fantasies. It's bad dialogue, perhaps; but that doesn't keep us from imagining it—quite the contrary, for it is a minor subspecies of pornography, whose necessary repetitiousness and obsessiveness it shares. The *Marienbad* case sets one limit for Pechter's method; to his relentless moral tests, the film yields no clear pink or blue reaction. It makes no statement; yet it exists, it presents something. But that something is not of the order which Pechter can analyze; he complains, thus, that "the deeper we probe into the characters' consciousness, the less we know and understand them." But what if the film is not "probing," or at least not probing "characters"—what if it is the complex embodiment of fantasy, something like visual dreaming? Pechter even ventures to speak confidently of "failure" when he surely must have considered that he could be misunderstanding the film's intention. At the end of his essay, conscious of the problem, he poses it in fancifully stark terms: whether art serves beauty or knowledge. He declares roundly that the end "must, of internal necessity, be that of knowledge"—but only after qualifying this to apply only "where the subject of art is the human being, at least, the human being as protagonist of an action." Thus finally he must beg the question—for whatever *Marienbad* is, it does not seem to be that sort of art. It is, rather, some weird transitional variant between the film drama we are familiar with and some as-yet-undefined species toward which film is moving. As Kipling had it in his story, something that is neither a turtle nor a hedgehog may still come into existence and survive, and

somebody will come along to name it armadillo. But poor *Marienbad* has no category in Pechter's nomenclature.

Nor is Pechter, to my way of thinking, really any more reliable than most critics on more conventional fare. In dealing with *The Wild Bunch*, he neglects the important *machismo* side of Peckinpah's personality (the film in fact owes major debts to a Mexican novel). Pechter thinks Nicholson the only interesting thing in *Easy Rider*, whereas his actorish performance seemed to me the major tonal flaw in the film—entertaining, but as out of place as an interjected juggling performance might have been.

Pechter's essay against Eisenstein is a bold attempt at a major overhauling job, but it still seems to me rather perverse. This is not because of its judgmental side—I am not greatly agitated by the question of whether or not *Potemkin* is a Great Classic, though I think it is rather more humanly interesting in an allegorical way than Pechter does—but because his essay merely sets up an undergraduate dichotomy and plumps for one side of it: Bazin and Renoir over Eisenstein and montage. But in the art history that must some day be written about film, no film-maker is an island; and Eisenstein, whose thought is immensely more complicated and subtle than Pechter admits, will have to be evaluated not only in the circumstances of the deadly society he inhabited but also in the context of a larger world artistic tendency with counterparts in other arts. Pechter skirts edges of this large problem here and there—he quotes Eisenstein on Joyce, thinking to ridicule only Eisenstein—but doesn't try to do anything with it.

Of Bergman, Pechter has little good to say—and even less of the recent films, where morality has given way to psychology and what Bergman also thinks of as a kind of music. He is good on *Psycho*; though (as I did too at the time) he misapprehends the ironies of the phony psychological ending. He makes a valiant defense of *The Birds* on the grounds that it is about "Nature outraged, nature revenged"—a kind of premature ecology story, with Jobian overtones—which I find clever but hope-

less, fundamentally a city person's misplaced fantasy ("nature's most beautiful and gentle creatures . . .").

Was will der Mensch? one of my philosophy professors used to begin by asking. And in Pechter's case the dominant underlying concern seems to be with the question, "Is this film or film-maker truly great?" The question can be interesting, and attempted answers to it can be interesting; but as an organizing principle of analysis it seems to me somehow deficient—its role really ought to be that of a working hypothesis, as it was for Bazin, but not the *end* of enquiry. Assuming and believing that *Bicycle Thief* is great, or that *Diary of a Country Priest* is great, Bazin always goes on to propound ideas of another order: ideas having to do with how the films work upon us, what their aesthetic assumptions and strategies are, ideas in short having to do with style, in the largest sense. Pechter has some ideas about style, but they largely boil down to negative propositions. Eisenstein is a bad artist (and a bad man, as well as a bad writer) because he elevated art above truth, thus betraying both man and art. *Marienbad* is a bad film because it is not about character and plot in a manner that provides "meaning" or truth. Bergman is a bad director because his is an art of surfaces.

Well then, what is this truth? Don't stay for the answer, because there really isn't one. Each artist has his own truth: Buñuel's that "this is the worst of all possible worlds" (I'd like to verify the original on that some day—did he say "the worst" or "not the best"?); Welles's, Renoir's, Fellini's. It seems to be, in fact, essential to a great artist that his truth cannot be described. But it is the role of the critic to discern and announce its existence, and to excoriate all those false artists who don't tell the truth.

Whatever its virtues, this is a narrower conception of the critic's task than most critics accept. Consequently, Pechter heaps much scorn for their laxness upon film magazines, film books, other film critics, and "film enthusiasts," and thus generates unfulfillable expectations in the reader that his own book will some-

how be a quantum jump ahead of other film writing. Pechter is a most intelligent and sensitive critic; disconcertingly, what keeps him from the very front ranks is precisely a certain hubris, a prideful fastidiousness which can become suspect even though it never becomes crippling as it does in the work of John Simon. Pechter quotes Lionel Trilling, on Agee, as saying that "nothing can be more tiresome than protracted sensibility"; but his 300 pages of careful, judicious, humane prose end merely with a section called "Theory," leading to the conclusions that critical consideration of art must be whole, cannot concentrate on mere technique, and is inherently dependent upon reactions to "the aesthetic ramifications of art's meaning."

It is any critic's right to imply that his candlepower exceeds others' by a significant margin, or that the darkness is denser in film than in other parts. But it is more accurate, as well as more modest, when critics recognize that their work is part of an inherently confused welter by which tastes and ideas rub upon created works and little by little give off the light, such as it is, by which we and posterity understand them. Bazin, who seems to me the most important film thinker of our times, was too busy analyzing films, trying out his ideas on them, constantly testing and revising and rethinking, to be much concerned with the sort of ultimate, permanent critical purity Pechter envisages as the goal. I would be the last to deny that film criticism could use a lot more sensibility of the kind Pechter possesses; but in itself that is not enough. We also need new ideas; and the fundamental ideas lurking in *24 Times a Second*, as in virtually all other current film writing, are still Bazinian. It is as if Bazin had thoroughly ploughed the field of film aesthetics right up to the edge of the precipice. We can retrace his work, refine it, even eke out a corner here or there that he missed. But nobody has yet figured how to fly off into the space at the edge.

Ironically, the only critic around with a patent on a theory is Andrew Sarris, whose

success as popularizer of the "auteur theory" was, as he genially points out in the introduction to *Confessions of a Cultist*, entirely inadvertent (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970. \$8.95). Worse still, this theory isn't a theory at all, but a practical critical policy: a good one within obvious limits, but of no analytical significance in itself whatsoever. When we look back over Sarris's columns of critical writing, as assembled in this volume, it's surely just as much a shambles as the film criticism he observed about him in 1955. He's a master of the light phrase ("Neorealism was never more than the Stalinallee of social realism") and he is charming about his extra-theoretical divagations—at least when you share them, as I do about Vitti. Sarris makes a halfhearted attempt to turn the auteur theory into "a theory of film history" in the introduction to *The American Cinema*; but a little later he remarks that it's "not so much a theory as an attitude." Actually, he doesn't have a real theoretical bone in his body; he is a systematizer, but that's quite a different matter, just as entomologists who revise the species classifications for bees are useful scholars, but not doing the same kind of work as researchers who try to figure out how bees fly. Sarris's early formulations of auteurism, as about *The Cardinal*, are significantly evasive: "Preminger's meaning" is said to be strongly expressed visually, but is nowhere described—as indeed, judging even by what else Sarris says of the film, it could hardly be by anybody. Admittedly, in this volume we get only a truncated Sarris. But a truncated pyramid is still visibly a pyramid. When one takes away Sarris's holy categories, however, there is nothing theoretical left; what is left is an urbane, witty writer with an elephantine memory and an accurate eye who often has sensible things to say about individual films and who can occasionally, as in his account of seeing *Madame X* on a transAtlantic jet, become quietly and movingly personal. The generalities he will sometimes venture are usually perverse: "The strength of underground cinema is basically documentary. The strength of classical cinema (including Bergman) is basically dramatic. The moderns—Godard, Resnais, Antoni-

oni, Fellini—are suspended between these two polarities." Moreover, by 1968 he could write in the *New York Times* a piece whose defense of auteurism is so mellow that it must seem mild to Pauline Kael (who can, of course, *out-auteur* anybody when she feels like it). At this point it seems clear that Sarris's contribution to American film thought has been massive in transmitting enthusiasms but minimal in analytical ideas.

Perhaps disappointingly, neither *Dwight Macdonald on Film* (New York: Berkeley Books, 1970. \$1.50) nor Stanley Kauffmann's new collection *Figures of Light* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971. \$7.95) offer any explicit, coherent view of the new relations developing between art and audience, though they are our two most socially concerned critics. Macdonald was famous for his own attempt at classification, his formula of masscult and midcult and *kitsch*. But as far as analytical ideas go, he cheerfully confesses that "being a congenital critic, I know what I like and why. But I can't explain the *why* except in terms of the specific work under consideration, on which I'm copious enough. The general theory, the larger view, the *gestalt*—these have always eluded me." He then trots out a number of rules of critical thumb, but only to prove his honesty by showing how they don't work. It is only in a piece about comedy that he is less diffident, and works out some general principles (he calls them "rules"); but these could apply to novels or plays just as well as to films. His long and careful commentaries on Soviet film, written in the thirties and forties, are to my mind excellent cultural criticism of a kind we also could use, but they don't contain anything original about film style.

Kauffmann, though he is concerned with the new audiences and the delicate balances between commercial hype and genuine novelty in "youth" films, isn't willing to venture any general ideas about what is going on, either; at the end of his new book he takes refuge in the vague notion that "standards in art and life are becoming more and more congruent." In a day when survival is a catchword, it may be

true that criticism should select and appraise "the works that are most valuable—most necessary—to the individual's *existence*." But how do we know which works those are? To determine this, we need ideas about the society we must survive in, the role of art in it, how we "use" art, and what makes art "useful."

The virtues of Manny Farber (*Negative Space*, New York: Praeger, 1970. \$7.95) have usually been taken to be those of the wise tough guy who looked at movies for their secret pleasures—those precious moments in the action flicks when a clever actor and a "subversive" director got together either to spoof the material or give it an instant of electric life. He liked plain, grubby stories, and he was allergic to pretensions at all levels, including those of auteurists; he could write of Hawks's *Only Angels Have Wings* as a "corny semi-catastrophe" and conclude that "No artist is less suited to a discussion of profound themes."

But there's more to Farber than that. Farber hates what has been happening to movies since about 1950, but that doesn't really matter, he could just as well have loved it—except that adoration has a tendency to blur vision. What counts is that he notices what has been happening, and indeed has been more willing than any other critic to try and elaborate on it in fairly general terms. If he might be called an aesthetic reactionary, at least he's a conscious and articulate one. Like Bazin, of whom one perhaps hears faint indirect echoes in Farber from time to time, he believes in realism. The excitement of action films comes from the fact that they confront us with the gutty, tough, cynical inhabitants of the American lower depths caught on the fly in miscellaneous unhallowed adventures, racing through stories of greed and desperation under the guidance of skilled and modest craftsmen. Appreciation of such films is a kind of shock-of-recognition operation—the film whirls you through its itinerary and here and there you notice things that matter, because they are *real*. Farber would never presume to hope for what Bazin saw in neorealism—whole, finished works of dense and

convincing realism—but he would have wanted it if he thought it could happen here.

Yet Farber never confronts the philosophical or aesthetic or indeed practical problems such a position presents. He is not some kind of Christian like Bazin, so he has no doctrine of immanence or anything like it. Though he is aware that film involves much pretense, he is unwilling to consider that “realism” is itself a set of conventions; his defense of the old style is ultimately an impossibly simplistic “imitation” theory. Thus he can argue: “What is unique in *The Wild Bunch* is its fanatic dedication to the way children, soldiers, Mexicans looked in the small border towns during the closing years of the frontier”—as if he (or we) had to have been there to enjoy or appraise the movie. He never confronts the phenomena of camp, whereby a bit of acting which strikes him as utterly real can seem totally phony to somebody else—especially somebody coming along a couple of decades after. (It has been found that fashions in clothes can’t be revived until 30 years have passed; does a similar cycle length perhaps prevail for film acting?)

But, from the standpoint of his devotion to the old Hollywood style, Farber sees pretty clearly what has been happening: how the former “objective” style, the anonymous, geographically reliable world of the Hollywood writer, cameraman, and editor, has given way to far more dubious forms dominated by directors, in which some vague directorial viewpoint or personality or style is supposed to be the center of interest, rather than the plot.

Nor is Farber’s perceptiveness only a recent development. As far back as 1952 he was complaining about *A Streetcar Named Desire* that “The drama is played completely in the foreground. There is nothing new about shallow perspectives, figures gazing into mirrors with the camera smack up against the surface, or low intimate views that expand facial features and pry into skin-pores, weaves of cloth, and sweaty undershirts. But there is something new in having the whole movie thrown at you in shallow dimension. Under this arrangement, with the actor and spectator practically nose to

nose, any extreme movement in space would lead to utter visual chaos, so the characters, camera, and story are kept at a standstill, with the action affecting only minor details, e.g., Stanley’s backscratching or his wife’s lusty projection with eye and lips . . . the fact is these films actually fail to exploit the resources of the medium in any real sense.” He exaggerates, of course; moreover, a few years later Kazan was to be the first director actually to use the vast expanses of CinemaScope with any visual activity—in *East of Eden*, a film Farber did not comment on. And we must admit that Farber’s analysis is often careless and suspect. Thus he remarks that Toland’s camera in *Kane* “loved crane-shots and floor-shots, but contracted the three-dimensional aspect by making distant figures as clear to the spectator as those in the foreground.” Would space have been expanded if they were fuzzy? On the contrary, keeping the backgrounds blurry (and the lead players in stronger light than anybody else) was a basic device of standard Hollywood craftsmanship to avoid perception of fuller spatial relations, resulting in compositions where the figures stood out but not really against anything—only as differentiated from a background blur, usually of constructed, shallow sets.

Nonetheless, Farber’s basic descriptive contention cannot, I think, be escaped: “The entire physical structure of movies has been slowed down and simplified and brought closer to the front plane of the screen so that eccentric effects can be deeply felt.” (81) “Movies suddenly [in the early 60’s] changed from fast-flowing linear films, photographed stories, and, surprisingly, became slower face-to-face constructions in which the spectator becomes a protagonist in the drama.” (190)

Since the Hollywood film is dead, and Farber knows we can never go back to that aesthetic home again, what is left? In a melancholic survey of the 1968 New York Festival, he plumps for Bresson’s *Mouchette*—because of the girl’s toughness, the down-and-out life surroundings taken straight; his terms of praise are that the film is “unrelievedly raw, homely,

and depressed," and here for some reason he does not mention Bresson's camera style, or note how odd it is that Bresson's excruciatingly refined and stripped-down handling should be the last refuge of the streamlined naturalism he loved in the action flicks. There's not much left in the cinema to love, for Farber. Some of Warhol's odd characters appeal to him; he approves of Michael Snow's "singular stoicism"; he likes *Ma Nuit Chez Maud* because of Trintignant's performance and the richness of its provincial detailing, and *Faces* grabs him because of Lynn Carlin. But no more do we enjoy "the comforting sense of a continuous interweave of action in deep space." We're caught up instead in conversations about movies—"a depressing, chewed-over sound, and . . . a heavy segment of any day is consumed by an obsessive, nervous talking about film."

For readers who only know Farber by his famous piece on "underground" (action) pictures, this new volume will establish that he is indeed one of our first-rank critics, with a very personal vision, an often irritating yet suggestive style, and faster ideational reaction-time than anybody around. But the acuteness of his vision is like looking down the wrong end of a telescope; everything looks very sharp, but small and going away.

In the one corner, thus, we have Farber, stoutly bemoaning the destruction of the movies—the replacement of the plotted and acted picture by exudations of the director's twisted psyche. In the other, we have Gene Youngblood, bemoaning the phoniness and redundancy of the plotted and acted picture and announcing the cinematic millenium because film-makers are at last portraying "their own minds."

I think Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema* (New York: Dutton, 1970. \$4.95) is an important book, so I want to get out of the way some minor criticisms of it. Youngblood writes in that blathering style common among media freaks—half Bucky Fuller mooning and half McLuhan "probes"—with a peculiarly alarming Teutonic tendency toward agglomeration. "The

dynamic interaction of formal proportions in kinaesthetic cinema evokes cognition in the articulate conscious, which I call kinetic empathy." (Who won World War II, anyway?) He can be staggeringly naive or unperceptive. ("A romantic heterosexual relationship of warm authenticity develops between Viva and Louis Waldron in the notorious *Blue Movie*.) He is prone to wild exaggeration and imprecise logic, but he is also the only film writer on video technology to display mastery of the subject. He is very unhistorical, which may merely be fashionable disdain of the past, but is more probably a youthful lack of familiarity with both the conventional and experimental cinema of the past—however lamentably unexpanded they may have been. Nonetheless, its drawbacks do not prevent the book from being a forceful and clear exposition of a theoretical position, like it or lump it.

Youngblood's view can be sketched thus: all previous cinema has been deficient because it has been falsely and tautologically "about" external things, to the neglect of the proper subject of cinema, namely the mind of the film-maker. In the synaesthetic cinema or expanded cinema, however, this dominance of the external is thrown off; all things become subjects of film perception and expression, nothing is taboo, "unfilmic," or impossible to deal with, and people use film as freely or wildly as poets use words. It turns out that the really distinguishing mark of synaesthetic cinema is superimposition, which guarantees that you are not seeing via a "transparent" medium, but via one which somebody has created—the function of superimposition is perhaps similar to that of the frame or canvas surface in illusionist painting. Sound is dissociated from image—for, as Bazin remarked, the coming of synch sound extinguished "the heresy of expressionism," and Youngblood is reviving it.

All this has some smell of novelty; does it perhaps have the substance as well? What is the philosophical and ideological basis of such a doctrine?

One way of getting at this question is to look back at earlier major shifts in film "theory."

We can now see that Bazin crystallized, in his defense of deep-focus and neorealism, the essence of the cinema of Christian Democracy—postwar European liberalism. (As Bazin himself pointed out, it is no argument against this that Italian script teams, for political insurance, customarily included one Communist, one Christian Democrat, one rightist, and one socialist.) Similarly, we can see in Eisenstein the essence of Bolshevik cinema—*montage* was “democratic centralism” in the hands of the film director, while deep-focus and widescreen allowed democratic participation in the image-reading process by the liberal middle-class spectator.

If we can see a similar over-simplified paradigm in Youngblood, it would probably be that of a coming technological slave culture, in which the masses of people are allowed to play with certain fascinating visual toys within a tightly controlled corporate society. At a discussion during the opening festivities of the University's Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley, Youngblood spoke of people playing with visual equivalents of Moog synthesizers—processing bits of film into their own personal video trips, presumably rather as our ancestors used to gather round the piano and sing “Daisy, Daisy.” What really catches his imagination is man-machine symbiosis: computers retrieving and storing and diagramming in a playful partnership with people—a sort of benign Big Brother fantasy in both the sibling and sociological senses.

There are two main problems with this kind of notion. One is aesthetic, and was put into blinding focus at the Berkeley symposium when somebody asked John Whitney how long it took him to make *Matrix*, no doubt expecting an answer like six hours. But it took three months of shooting (fully assisted by sophisticated computer hardware) and three more months of editing, filtering, and printing. Now *Matrix* is not a frightfully complex production project in its own area, and it is a highly precise, mathematical kind of work which probably entails less than the usual stresses and indecisions of artistic creation. In short, we are

not about to enter some kind of aesthetic paradise in which every man can become his own electronic-wizard artist. Indeed the lesson of Youngblood's own tastes is that the best of the “synaesthetic” artists he discusses (Belson, Brakhage, Hindle) don't even use electronic technology, only rather ingenious but conventional home-made rigs, in which the impact of the human hand, brain, and eye can be directly and intimately achieved. I don't wish to assert that there is a simple inverse relation between technological involvement and artfulness—if there were, modelling clay would be our greatest art form. But artfulness does not spring from technology, it *uses* technology. When you ask machines to create something, as in the computer-generated films Youngblood describes, it comes out dreadfully flat and dull. Even the most sophisticated machines so far built have no sense of play.

What they do have is a high price tag, and this connects with the second problem, which is a social one. Modern technology is extraordinarily expensive, and it is owned, in a patent and often in a literal sense, by giant corporations which lease it out. Youngblood talks like some kind of radical, and writes for the underground *LA Free Press*, but he seems surprisingly comfortable with big business, and sometimes seems to think it philanthropically inclined to coddle our perceptions. Yet we must notice that the only way artists have gotten at complex video technology is through the ETV stations in SF and Boston and by the “artist in residence” situation at Bell Telephone and a few other corporations. It is not only chroma-key video equipment which is tightly controlled, either; the coming wave of EVR and other cassette distribution systems is similarly tightly held, with patents flying like shrapnel. The sole aspect of video technology which is freely available to artists and users the world over—largely thanks to Japanese initiative, it seems—is half-inch video tape, a cheap, convenient but shabbily low-definition medium. Anybody using the other systems will not be his own master; he may not be as bad off as artists at the mercy of old-fashioned

producers or distributors, but he will be in jeopardy whenever he becomes unorthodox.

Youngblood writes of the new technology creating a technoanarchy in which all men's creativity is freed. This kind of optimism is not just constitutional, of course, but springs from a particular philosophical position—one which, in my opinion, fits neatly into the program of the technofascism which is what is *really* developing in our society. Youngblood's position is a confused and oversimplified one. "We've been taught by modern science that the so-called objective world is a relationship between the observer and the observed, so that ultimately we are able to know nothing but that relationship." (127) A few pages later he breezily remarks, "There's no semantic problem in a photographic image. We can now see through each other's eyes . . ." (130) To compound these basic confusions, he also contends that the "media," by which he and other McLuhanites tend to mean not whole, real-people social institutions but only their technical manifestations, are becoming and will be our only reality: our very minds will be merely extensions of the worldwide media net.

This kind of view has been put so often lately that it is necessary to say why it is not reasonable, or perhaps even sane. First of all, we are creatures with a very detailed biological constitution that has powerful mental components; moreover, the psychological development of a human being takes place on a level of experience quite different from that of the media. Without necessarily being Freudian about it, our minds are much more extensions of our experiences in babyhood and childhood than they are of anything that happens to us later. We must expect the replacement of a good deal of normal parental interaction by interaction with television sets to have significant effects on our children and on their own later child-rearing practices as adults—effects in the direction of depersonalization, passivity, and so on. Even so, the residues and constancies of our biological condition and earliest life persist; they account for the myths that concerned Jung, and in a different sense Bazin. They are, indeed, most of

what enables us to continue as viable mammals, rather than appendages of machines.

Second, the development of society, of which the media are only one part, is a material process. "Information" freaks like to argue that objects don't matter any more—only information is important, and since information is immaterial, we have transcended materialism. This seems to me a gross and pathetic delusion. In fact, the more highly technological our society becomes, the more dependent it is on physical objects, and the more numerous, tightly controlled, and demanding of natural resources those objects become; in short, the more sheer power is at stake, and the more the power relationships of the society come to bear. Since power in our society is chiefly ownership power, we can't possibly understand the media and what they are doing to us without understanding who owns them and what their purposes are. In the real world media do not "expand" of their own accord.

Like most idealist positions, Youngblood's is founded on physics metaphors rather than biology ones: despite the seeming modernity of much computer talk, it is still basically nineteenth-century thinking—childishly and enthusiastically fascinated with the machine, eager to assimilate human actions to parallels with machines.

I would like to note two puzzles which arise from the films Youngblood discusses, but which do not seem to worry him. We can see two general trends or types of film in Youngblood's examples—the classic, mathematical, abstract work of the Whitneys, people who work with computer simulation, etc., and another trend in which the imagery is drawn from the real world, though perhaps much transformed—Belson, Baillie, Hindle, Brakhage, Bartlett and DeWitt, etc. The films of the former group are often intriguing, beautiful, or startling; but it is only films in the later group which are moving. Why is this?

My own guess is that it has to do with the way our perceptual processes work. We do not really perceive abstractions; if Gestalt-oriented

psychologists such as Rudolf Arnheim are to be believed, abstractions are indeed inherent parts of the methodology of the perceiving process itself. "Pure" shapes such as those of the Whitney films thus pose a kind of short-circuit situation; in this they are perhaps akin to certain antique mosaics or some op art. They cannot be sufficiently mixed and muddled to be stimulating to our entire perceptual resources, like part of the real world; it is too obvious that they are simply what they are, whereas our evolution has equipped us precisely to cope with those appealing or disturbing things whose nature may not be obvious. Youngblood is scornful of the repetitions and tautologies of the fiction drama film; but repetitions are pretty clearly the stuff of our mental processes, and I would hazard indeed that it is in certain obscure repetitions (perhaps of earlier experiences we happen to share with the film-maker) that we would find the source of what touches us—even in quite abstract films like *Re-Entry*.

The other puzzle concerns the visual characteristics of images that have been passed through a video system—like those of *OffOn*, *Moon 69*, *The Leap*, and so on. It seems to me that their characteristic visual style is significant in some way, but I don't know of what. Of course they have scanning lines: a constant visible interference with clear vision. Their colors are photoluminescent, rather than the dye colors of ordinary photography; with such colors it is impossible to achieve quite what we think of as "natural" tones, as of skin, leaves, earth, or water. Moreover, that crucial superimposition is an immensely easier and more flexible technique in video than in conventional film work, and some kinds of color keying and dropping-out can be done in video that can not be done in film at all, or only through the most tedious kind of hand work. All these qualities of the video image certainly make for a "dramatic" image, that is, an image whose own nature is a strong focus of attention, just as they go against a "realistic" image, that is, an image that seems to be transparent in the way Bazin loved.

It may be that imagery of this sort is properly namable as *hallucinatory*: vision in which the heuristic or biological function of sight is subsumed to an introspective, purely "visionary" function: one in which we no longer see in order to learn or to act, but in order to enjoy seeing *itself*. (We might, clearly, argue certain parallels between this kind of imagery and modern painting.) Youngblood is curiously reticent about the relation between drugs and "expanded cinema," but it is commonplace among heads that certain films are "trippy" while others are not. Films, indeed, offer the opportunity for a kind of tripping that painting, for instance, cannot offer, no matter how "visionary" the painter tries to be. (Most hip painting, ironically, turns out merely fanciful in a grotesque way, without any of the magical perceptual stimulation of the film trips.)

If we are entering an era of hallucinatory film in some such sense, this may also explain away one difficulty about video transformation work. With a network control room at your disposal you can do what Youngblood visualized as happening at a visual synthesizer: you can transform images according to dozens of technical commands, superimposing, echoing, changing their color, contrast, orientation in space, and so on. Putting into the machine only a few minutes of color film original, you could come out with hours of wildly varied and superimposed material, like a huge symphony based on the theme "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." But if the conventional narrative film is formalized and redundant, what would we say of such an operation?

No: the artist must still deal with his images; no machine can do it for him. And art is long and madness-making. In the end, Youngblood's heresy is the familiar American one, that technology can save us, that by building a better object we can redeem our souls. In his Los Angeles terminology, this approach leads to "the new man." So it may, alas. But it won't lead to good films.

If, as both Farber and Youngblood imply, we are indeed entering an era of unrealistic

or even hallucinatory cinema, in both the feature and underground or independent films, can we foresee anything of the questions that aesthetic theory must try to answer? Rudolf Arnheim, in his pioneer work four decades ago, dwelt on the nonrealistic elements of the film image—those aspects of it which abstracted from (or distracted from) its faithfulness to things photographed. Yet Arnheim was able to do this kind of analysis comfortably precisely because an abiding faith in reality still existed: film might abstract from reality, all right, but everybody knew it was still there, waiting to be kicked, like the tree Johnson used to refute Bishop Berkeley. With Youngblood and other media freaks, this basic certainty has been seriously eroded, though not perhaps as seriously as they like to imagine. But do we therefore face an era solely of what Henderson calls part-whole theories: theories of formal organization, in which what is represented or used as material for art is of little interest compared to the ways in which the artist manipulates it? I think not, basically because there is now a much greater sophistication among us about the relations between artistic styles and social phenomena. Purely formalist theories, thus, are likely to seem empty and decadent to most people who care about such things. Hard though it may be, we are going to have to develop theories which deal both with forms and with their relation to audiences and the societies to which the audiences belong.

Such theories cannot be developed in isolation from the rest of our cultural life, nor in isolation from our personal lives and personal relations with films and other film-goers; we have to try anew to make sense of the current movie-going experience (or the electronic forms that displace it) just as "going to the movies" made social and intellectual sense to Kael or Farber in their youth. No search for meaning or value in art can be conducted on the basis solely of pure sensitivity and intelligence, as Pechter imagines; any search for meaning is inevitably engaged in some kind of social debate or indeed (to use a hackneyed term that

is still viable) struggle. A critic's intelligence cannot be "committed," in the sense that Kael has made pejorative, but it cannot help being *engaged* with some explicit sense of the potentialities of film art and of our culture generally. There is no need to conceive these potentialities dogmatically or narrowly; but critics must try to conceive of them in some way, and apply their conceptions aggressively to developments in film-making, if criticism is not to be simply entertaining opinion-mongering.

It would seem, then, that the particular task confronting our little film magazines at present is to seek out and develop critical writing with some theoretical ambitiousness and bite. Obviously no one can will ideas into being; they must come from our social experience, as Eisenstein's were stimulated by the Russian Revolution and Bazin's by the Liberation. But among the many new and good writers who are coming out of the great wave of interest in film, I hope that we editors can manage to find and encourage and publish those who are engaged in developing the genuinely new ideas we need.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK, cont'd.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

In hopes of improving the efficiency of its subscription office, the University of California Press will henceforth be requiring payment to accompany new subscription orders.

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